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SUBJECT KGB and Britain

DAVID HARTMAN: The Soviet KGB chief in London defects to the West, the British expel Soviets, the Soviets respond by expelling British citizens. Sounds like the movies, but it's real. And these events are raising a number of serious questions.

Joining us from London this morning, Christopher Andrew. He's a historian at Cambridge University. He's written a number of books on espionage. His next is coming out shortly, called His Majesty's Secret -- Her Majesty's Secret Service: History of the Secret Service in Britain.

And joining us from Washington, William Colby, former Director of the CIA.

How has this particular defection and the events that have followed affected the Soviets' ability to conduct intelligence-gathering in Britain, in Scandinavia, in all of the West?

CHRISTOPHER ANDREW: The short answer to that is, very badly indeed, at least in the short term.

What it's also shown is that the British media's view of British intelligence, and I think the American media's view of British intelligence, over the last decade has been wholly wrong. What the British media has done, what the American media has done is to judge the performance of British intelligence from the short-term failures. Now, the problem is, the short-term failures become public knowledge far ahead of the long-term successes.

So, we've got it wrong...

HARTMAN: In other words, you're saying -- you've been saying it's better than the media has cracked it up to be.

ANDREW: Absolutely, because there is a long time lag between the discovery of failures and the discovery of successes. The failures, as in the case of, for example, the Soviet mole within our equivalent of the NSA, the GCHQ, which breaks other people's codes, intercepts their communications, the Prime Affair became public knowledge a couple of years ago. But our successes, the fact that, for example, we have somebody who has been almost as good as Oleg Penkovsky, who helped you out during the Cuban Missiles Crisis in 1962, that's been a secret until very recently.

So, the problem about the media -- and I think that includes the American as well as the British -- is that they judge the performance of intelligence services from short-term failures, and they know nothing about long-term successes until much later.

HARTMAN: Doctor, how surprised were you at Mikhail Gorbachev's reaction to the expulsion of the Soviets from Britain? How good a diplomatic move does it strike you as?

ANDREW: I wasn't surprised at all. Since he gave an interview to -- was it Time magazine, I believe? -- the illusion has grown up in the United States that he's a nice guy. Well, he's quite an impressive guy. He's a realist. He's a very tough character. But the idea that anyone who rises to the top of the Kremlin has any chance whatever of being a nice guy is an appalling illusion.

HARTMAN: How -- what effect will this have on the Soviets' ability in the next three months, six months to get things back together again in intelligence in Britain?

ANDREW: Over the short term, they've got a terrible problem. And their problem is compounded by the fact that we fooled them the last time. Because a year ago we expelled the head of the KGB in London, a man called Gouk (?). And the reason we did that was that we figured that his second-in-command would take over from him. And his second-in-command was a guy called Gordievski.

So this time they must have terrible problems in wondering whether the man who's going to succeed Gordievski is working for us or for them or for both.

HARTMAN: All right, Doctor. Thank you.

And let's go to William Colby in Washington.

Mr. Colby, how significant, this defection and all the things that have happened since?

WILLIAM COLBY: Oh, I think it's very significant, from the Soviet point of view. They are -- obviously, they lost a very good man. They lost a lot of assets, not only in Britain, but up in Scandinavia, presumably. So they must be deeply concerned. Which I think is part of the reaction the Soviets had to the British expulsion. You're attacking the KGB, and in the Soviet Union you don't attack the KGB.

If the CIA got involved in some mistake like this, the Congress would be attacking it, charging it first with failure, and so forth. But not in the Soviet Union. You rally behind the KGB at that point.

HARTMAN: What effect might this have on East-West relations right now? We've got the Gorbachev-Reagan, Reagan-Gorbachev talks coming up. We've got the arms talks cranking up again on Thursday in Geneva. What effect on relations?

COLBY: I don't think a major effect, quite frankly. The British threw out 105 Soviets a few years ago, and the Soviets and the British maintained relations. This is kind of a normal in the spy business worldwide. And as a result, you do have these kinds of incidents.

But the more important political relationships, which are characterized by the summit, will go on despite them.

HARTMAN: Mr. Colby, you know, it's interesting. Hearing your tone of voice as you spoke just then, well, you say it's kind of normal in the spy business and these things go on, and so forth and so on. Which raises a question: We read now about a number of West Germans, including this morning we hear that a secretary in Chancellor Kohl's office, they think, may have defected back to the East, a number of other stories coming out of West Germany at the present time. Now this story out of England. We have the Walker, some members of the Walker family here alleged, and so forth, to have spied for the Soviets.

With all of this, and the headlines and sub rosa that goes on day after day, year after year, things don't seem to have changed too much. I mean the Soviets, the East and the West in 40 years of cold that's heated up and so forth. But things haven't seemed too have changed that much.

So, what's the effect of all this intelligence? What's

it really accomplish?

COLBY: Well, the fact is that the Soviets have a bureaucratic compulsion. The KGB is a great institution in the Soviet Union and it has a compulsion to continue spying. Now, they have learned a few lessons, that you can learn more about Western societies by reading the papers and reading the op-eds, and so forth, than you can by spying. They still spy, however, and they focus on technology, military secrets, and so forth.

On our side, we have a problem of knowing, basically, what's going on in the Soviet Union. We have to use espionage to get the things that our fancy cameras don't get.

HARTMAN: So we're at a disadvantage.

COLBY: We're at a disadvantage in that respect. I happen to think the result is a much stronger society on our side, that this open society of ours has enormous strengths which a closed, controlled society does not.

HARTMAN: Mr. Colby, welcome back. Good to have you with us this morning....